

CHAPTER VII

EARLY TRAINING

Nursing and growing up—herdboy gang life and the learning of veld-love—an institutionalized play-school—'crossing' rites and the significance of ordeals and obscene language—opportunities and satisfactions of old age—the task of the modern school.

000 **W**e have not yet dealt with all the values and arrangements of Lovedu society to which the individual must be adjusted if he is to become a co-operating member. But it will not be premature to give a short review of the moulding process, as we shall thereby be led to consider some striking institutions of the tribe. The moulding of the individual is a lifelong process; yet some of the main characteristics appear early.

853 To the Lovedu the aggressiveness of young European children of two
854 or three years old and their inability to play amicably later on with other
•165 children, characteristics natural in a competitive, non-co-operative, individualistic society like ours, are a source of surprise and often also amusement. 'European children are not like ours,' they say. 'They like very much to fight.' The Lovedu child is from early infancy treated with great lenience and kindness. 'Care for it,' they say even of an uterine child, 'for to-morrow it will care for you' (*khi lele, ga matso khi lele wema*). There are no struggles for food, no strict rules of feeding. Whenever an infant cries, it is put to the breast. If its mother is away, its grandmother or even the young girl nursing it may put it to their breast to comfort it; but it is strictly forbidden for a suckling mother to allow any but her own child to drink of her milk. A woman who allowed a baby to cry without attending to it and trying to hush it would be severely reprimanded by the older women of the village. A baby is never left alone. Indeed, it is almost an appendix of its mother, at night sleeping against her naked breast, by day being carried on her back in its skin cradle. A woman, it is said, may forget all manner of things, but never the skin cradle of her child. When a mother wants to go out, there is never any problem as to what to do with baby. He is simply strapped to her back to accompany her, and should she choose to dance at a ceremony, even the most violent jumping movements would leave him unperturbed. So accustomed does a Lovedu baby become to his position on his mother's back that, when picked up, he quite naturally stretches out his feet at right angles to his body. While his mother stamps or hoes, the baby will be nursed by his grandmother or a nurse girl a little older than himself. This mode of life and treatment gives the child a sense of security, safety, and warmth. His wants are immediately attended to and the absence of cloth spares him even such small discomforts as wet nappies.

866 Before the long suckling period is over, the child is already walking and forms part of a group of toddlers, who give him his first lessons in independence. If he falls and hurts himself while playing with them, there is no one to fuss over him; if another child hits him, he will hit back or

867 and to be bound up with language itself. A group of small girls were playing house in the sand with twigs and pebbles and tiny pots moulded in clay. 'What have you got in those pots?' we asked. 'Dyalma' (beer), came the reply, but the intonation and meaning they put into the word, the expression on their faces as they said it, implied a whole social situation. It was clear that, young as they were, the word 'beer' meant to them, not just a drink or food like porridge, but something prized and valuable, yet a source of pleasure and joy, something important in life. In short, they had a Lovedu attitude to beer, an attitude that has no parallel in European society. Certainly no European child could have conveyed what they did in that single word.

Where the standards of the society are apt to conflict to some extent with personal desires, as in the inculcation of good manners, censure and praise become important. If a child does not accept a gift with both hands he is told to do so with some remark, if he is big enough and should know better, calculated to rebuke him. Good manners in eating consists in avoiding noisy or hurried swallowing (one can smack one's lips to one's heart's content) and in sitting flat on the buttocks, not standing or squatting. Great importance is attached to the sharing of food: if any one approaches while you eat, he is automatically invited to share it by the words, 'We are eating.' His reply is either a refusal or consists in his sitting down to join you. Even small children are made to share tit-bits with their companions. If you give some sweets to good-mannered children such as you find in parts unaffected by the modern self-seeking spirit, you will still see how an elder girl calls all the children to sit down round the sweets. They eat slowly and decorously, each taking a second sweet when the first is finished with no sign of greed or hurry, in spite of the fact that they rarely see sweets. This does not mean that Lovedu children do not on occasion try to hide their sweets from others; but greater stress is laid on sharing food by them than by us and, what is more important, there are always half a dozen other children on the spot to share whatever is given. A child is taught to respect those older than himself, especially adults in whose presence there must be no swearing or bad language. When sent on errands, he must obey gracefully without grumbling. A child who observes these rules will be praised by adults to other children. They will say, 'The child of So-and-so is very polite, has good manners.'

The qualities that are most admired in adults and that therefore are most insisted upon in children are generosity and unselfishness and ability to live in peace with others. Quarrelsomeness is one of the worst faults. Thus it is that, when children fight or quarrel, there is never any inquiry into who began the trouble; both are beaten, so that next time, even when in the right, the child will be afraid to fight. There is a proverb that 'it is the child that cries who is given to eat' (*wanyana ka la ye a ilako*) and in later life misplaced modesty as regards asking for the things one needs is deprecated. A man who as a guest diffidently nibbles at instead of enjoying the food lavished upon him by his host or who timidly passes by instead of begging for beer, even if it is the beer-party of the chief, suffers a loss for which only his over-sensitiveness is to blame,